

Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2010

Remarks at V&M STAR Ohio in Youngstown, Ohio

May 18, 2010

The President. Hello, hello, hello. Hey! It's good to see you. Thank you. Thank you, everybody. Everybody, please have a seat.

Let me first of all just say thank you to some people who are doing outstanding work, beginning with somebody who I think is one of the best Governors we've got in this country and just a great guy, give it up for Ted Strickland, your Governor. You've got a outstanding young mayor, Mayor Jay Williams. The mayor of Girard, Jim Melfi, is here as well; Secretary of State Jennifer Brunner; and three terrific Members of Congress: Tim Ryan, Charlie Wilson, John Boccieri. Give them all a big round of applause.

It is good to be back in Ohio, and it is good to be back in Mahoning Valley. I appreciate the chance to tour this unbelievable facility. You know, sometimes when you're President, you get kind of jaded. You know, you've seen a lot of stuff, you go through these factories. This one, when you walk through, is just unbelievable. It's like off of a movie set. And so it was exciting to see, but what was especially exciting was to see all the people who are working here and to see the work that you're doing here.

So I saw the 85-ton electric arc furnace. I didn't see any evidence, but I know that you're building Iron Man's suits somewhere in here. [*Laughter*]

I appreciate the time that I've had to spend with all of you, partly because it's just nice to get out of Washington. Washington's a wonderful place, beautiful, nice monuments. I have this nice home office, live right above the store, so I don't have a commute. But sometimes in Washington, everybody's spending all their time arguing about politics, and you lose track of the folks who sent you there in the first place. And so it's important for me to meet you directly and hear your concerns and your hopes and your dreams. And I've been trying to make a habit out of doing this. About once a week, I try to take a trip like this just to talk to folks who are working in various parts of our economy and to find out what's going on in communities. And obviously, the issue that's front and center on everybody's minds is the state of our economy.

In the 2 years I was running for President, I wasn't any stranger to this State. These guys know I came here an awful lot. And I saw firsthand what years of failed policies had done to working families, and I saw how hard these guys were working to put Ohio back to work. And the Mahoning Valley is a place that doesn't need an economist to tell you when a recession begins or when a recession ends, because plenty of folks here have known their own private recessions for 10, 20, 30 years. Now, they may not have seen one like the one we just had, with an unemployment rate here that's at 14 percent and families having a tougher time than they'd ever imagined. And a lot of people—let's just be blunt—aren't always real impressed when a Governor or a President comes swooping in and talking about the economy, because the only headline they want to see is the headline that says "You're Hired."

But I do want to talk about a piece of encouraging news for a change—something concrete, not just a lot of talk—because for a lot of the last 2 years, you didn't always get a lot of good news.

A year ago, we took significant action to jump-start economic growth and job creation. That action included making investments in sectors with the greatest potential for private sector job growth, areas like clean energy and infrastructure.

And one of those investments is going towards revitalizing the site right next door, preparing it for new construction, and building a rail spur that connects to the Norfolk Southern line that runs through town. So as a result of this investment, V&M STAR's parent company decided to invest \$650 million of its own money—its own money to build a new 1-million-square-foot mill right here in Youngstown, the largest industrial plant built in the valley since GM built its plant over in Lordstown in the 1960s. Think about that: biggest investment since the 1960s—50 years. So right here, in the heart of the old steel corridor, where some never thought we'd see an investment like this again, they're placing a bet on American manufacturing and on this community.

And that bet's going to pay off for 400 construction jobs once they break ground this summer, 350 new manufacturing jobs once the mill comes on line, which doubles the current workforce. And as everybody here knows, every time a new factory or plant opens or expands in America, it doesn't just employ the people who are working at the plant; everybody here, suddenly, they've got a little more money to go buy lunch somewhere or buy a computer for their kids or do something else. And so the—it becomes an economic lifeline for the whole community, capable of supporting hundreds, even thousands of jobs indirectly. And so that's a success story that all of you are part of.

Now, I don't want to suggest that this one plant and the jobs it'll create are going to make the difference for the entire community. I mean, it took us decades to get to where we are; it's going to take some time to get to the point where we need to be. But just think about where we were a year ago: Our economy was collapsing; our businesses were losing 750,000 jobs every month; economists across the spectrum were warning very seriously of the possibility of another great depression. And all of this was on top of one of the toughest decades for America's middle class that we've ever seen.

So that was the situation just a year ago. Everybody's got a—kind of a selective memory here, but nobody was sure whether the economy was going to hold up. So we had to make a choice: We could sit back, do nothing, make a bunch of excuses, play politics, and watch America's decline, or we could stand up and fight for our future.

And I ran for President, Youngstown, because I believe that we're at a defining moment in our history. And if we're going to keep the American Dream alive—not just for us, but for the next generation—then we couldn't just sit back and put off solving these big problems. We had to tackle them head on.

Job one was rescuing our economy. And that required some steps that were, frankly, unpopular, steps like stabilizing a financial system that was on the brink of collapse and intervening in an auto industry that was on the brink of extinction. I knew those steps would be unpopular. Even in Ohio, even in Michigan, even in automaking States, if you polled, people said, "Don't do anything about the auto companies." And I knew, politics being what it is, that some people would try to score political points off our decisions.

But I think it's fair to say—any fairminded person would say that if we hadn't acted, more people in the valley, more people in Ohio, more people across America would be out of work today. And I mean, I can just give you a very concrete example: The GM plant over in Lordstown would not be there, because GM would have liquidated.

Instead, GM's paying back its debts, turned a profit for the first time in 3 years, and a third shift is about to come back to work in Lordstown, putting that plant at maximum capacity—[*applause*—right next door. And by the way, it was in part because of the decisions that these three guys made in Congress. That's not easy. They've been knocked around; they got lumps all over the backs of their heads—some on top. [*Laughter*] But it was the right thing to do.

Today my administration is announcing a landmark agreement to help dozens of communities like Youngstown revitalize and redevelop old, shuttered GM facilities, preparing them for new industries and new jobs and new opportunity.

These steps were the right thing to do. And it was the right thing to do to give tax relief to small businesses and working families right in the middle of this enormous recession—4.5 million working families in Ohio alone got tax breaks. Most of you guys didn't know it, didn't notice it in your paycheck. We didn't go around advertising it. But each paycheck was a little bit bigger because of the steps that we took, and that meant that you could recirculate that money into the economy and keep demand up, which helped avert a depression. That was the right thing to do.

It was the right thing to do to give loans to small businesses to keep their doors open. More than 2,400 right here in Ohio got small-business loans because of the Recovery Act, because of the work that these guys did.

It was the right thing to do to extend unemployment benefits and make COBRA cheaper for people caught up in the recession until they could get back on their feet. There's probably not a single person here who doesn't know somebody who either got unemployment benefits or used COBRA to make sure they could keep health insurance for their families when they lost their job. That was the right thing to do.

It was the right thing to do to help Governors like Ted avoid massive cuts to Medicaid and layoffs to teachers and police officers.

And it was the right thing to do to invest in this town's infrastructure. We put all of that stuff in the recovery package because it was the right thing to do.

Now, we've got a long way to go before this recovery is felt in the lives of our neighbors and in all the communities that have lost so much ground in this recession and in years before.

But despite that sobering reality, despite all the naysayers in Washington, who are always looking for the cloud in every silver lining, the fact is, our economy's growing again. Last month, we gained 290,000 jobs. So think about this: We gained more jobs last month than any time in 4 years. And it was the fourth month in a row that we've added jobs, and almost all those jobs are in the private sector. Everybody talks about Government was doing this, Government was doing that. No, what we did was we encouraged the private sector, gave them the funding, the financing, the support, the infrastructure support in order to invest and get the economy moving again.

And last month also brought the largest increase in manufacturing employment since 1998—1998, because I believe in manufacturing, and I believe in manufacturing right here in the United States of America. We can compete against anybody. Youngstown can compete against anybody—got the best workers. There's no reason why we can't compete with anybody if you guys have the support that you need.

And you know what? I think those critics who have been trying to badmouth these efforts—they know it's working. These folks who opposed us every step of the way, predicting nothing but failure, they know it's working, because—this always puts a smile on my face—even as they've tried to score political points attacking these Members of Congress, a lot of them go home and then they claim credit for the very things they voted against. They'll show up at the—to cut the ribbons. They'll put out a press release. They'll send the mailings touting the very projects that they were opposing in Washington. They're trying to have it both ways.

I know that's hard to imagine in politics, that a politician might try to have it both ways, but here's the fact: If the "just say no" crowd had won out, if we had done things the way they wanted to go, we'd be in a deeper world of hurt than we are right now. Families wouldn't have seen those tax cuts. Small businesses wouldn't have gotten those loans or those health care tax credits that they're now eligible for. Insurance companies would still be deciding who they want to cover and when they want to cover them and dropping your health care coverage whenever they felt like it.

The steady progress we're beginning to see across America would not exist, and neither would the plant that you're about to build. So I invite anybody who thinks we shouldn't have taken those actions that we took last year, or made those investments, to come to Youngstown and explain to us why that plant shouldn't be built.

Come talk to Ted Strickland and the mayor. Come tell us why companies like this in towns like Youngstown shouldn't be given every chance to expand and add new jobs. Tell us why small businesses shouldn't receive tax credits so they can help purchase health insurance for their employees. Explain why seniors shouldn't get help paying for their medications when they hit that gap called the doughnut hole. Explain why we should tell families that children with preexisting conditions aren't going to be able to get health insurance because we decided that insurance companies should be able to do whatever they wanted.

They need to explain why they would be nothing to make—doing nothing to solve some of these problems that have been plaguing America for years now, decades.

So I'm here to say, that's not how we deal with crisis. That's not what America's about. We did not become the greatest economic power that the world has ever known by avoiding problems. The United States of America does not play for second place. We step up, we face our challenges, we compete, and we win. And that's something we should all agree on.

But everybody should be able to agree on that. For all the things we've gotten done, despite the unified, determined opposition of one party, imagine how much further we could have gotten if I'd gotten a little help, if people decided to step up. It doesn't mean they have to agree with me on everything, but step up, take responsibility, don't just play political games.

Audience member. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President. You're welcome.

Audience member. We got your back.

The President. I truly—it is not too late to work together, not when there's so much progress to make, so many more success stories like this one to write. Because we're not Democrats first or Republicans first; we are Americans first. That's what we're about.

So I know it's still tough. I know a lot of times the future still feels uncertain. And I'm not going to stand here and pretend that things are back to normal or even close to where they

need to be. I read too many letters each night from people who are hurting, who are still out of work. So I know things are still tough out there.

But I will tell you one thing: It's people like you, people in towns like Youngstown all across America that I'm thinking about every single day when I go to the Oval Office. I ran for office to make sure not just you, but your kids and your grandkids have a shot at the American Dream, because I wouldn't be in office if somebody hadn't worked hard to give me a shot at the American Dream. I didn't come from money. I didn't come from a powerful family. I got a name nobody could pronounce. [Laughter] But somebody gave me a shot. Somebody made an investment in me.

That's why I ran for President. That's why I wake up every morning insisting to everybody who works for me that we're not going to rest until the future brightens for middle class Americans all across this country, hard-working people. And I'm absolutely convinced that the steps that we're taking are going to help us bring about a better future for America.

I believe that seeking new markets for our exports is the right thing to do and that enforcing the rules of free and fair trade is the right thing to do for our workers and for our companies. I believe that investing in a clean energy economy to create good jobs of the future, building pipe for natural gas, but also building windmills and steel—and turbines and advanced batteries for the new generation of electric cars, that's the right thing to do for our economy and for our environment. I believe that raising standards in our schools and making college more affordable and upgrading our community colleges is the right thing to do so that every child has a chance to live out their dreams. I believe that reforming our health care system to crack down on the worst practices of the insurance companies and giving everybody a decent shot at getting health insurance is the right thing to do. And trying to control costs on premiums is the right thing to do. It's the right thing to do for families, and it's the right thing to do for businesses.

So we're going to keep up every effort to rebuild our economy and restore some security for the middle class, a middle class forged in plants just like this one, so that places like Youngstown don't just survive year after year, but they are thriving year after year. And as long as I have the privilege of being your President, I'm going to keep fighting for a future that is brighter for this community and for Ohio and for the United States of America, the country that we love.

God bless you. God bless all the work here. God bless the United States of America. Appreciate you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:30 p.m.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : V&M STAR Ohio in Youngstown, OH.

Locations: Youngstown, OH.

Names: Boccieri, John A.; Brunner, Jennifer; Melfi, James J.; Ryan, Timothy J.; Strickland, Theodore; Williams, Jay; Wilson, Charlie.

Subjects: Business and industry : Automobile industry :: General Motors Corp., bankruptcy of; Business and industry : Automobile industry :: Improvement; Business and industry : Automobile industry :: Strengthening efforts; Business and industry : Banks and financial institutions :: Loans to small businesses, increase; Business and industry : Manufacturing industry :: Improvement; Business and industry : Manufacturing industry :: Strengthening

efforts; Business and industry : Small and minority businesses; Commerce, international : Free and fair trade; Commerce, international : U.S. exports :: Expansion; Economy, national : American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009; Economy, national : Economic concerns; Economy, national : Improvement; Economy, national : Recession, effects; Economy, national : Strengthening efforts; Education : Postsecondary education :: Affordability; Education : Postsecondary education :: Community colleges; Education : Standards and school accountability; Employment and unemployment : Job creation and growth; Employment and unemployment : Job losses; Employment and unemployment : Unemployment insurance; Energy : Alternative and renewable sources and technologies; Energy : Alternative energy products and technologies, U.S. production; Energy : Battery technology for hybrid automobiles; Energy : Domestic sources; Energy : Solar and wind energy; Health and medical care : Cost control reforms; Health and medical care : Health insurance reforms; Health and medical care : Health insurance, protection of coverage; Health and medical care : Insurance coverage and access to providers; Health and medical care : Medicare and Medicaid; Health and medical care : Seniors, prescription drug benefits; Health and medical care : Small businesses, tax credits to purchase insurance coverage; Ohio : Governor; Ohio : Job creation and growth; Ohio : President's visits; Ohio : Tax relief; Ohio : Transportation, mass transit and rail infrastructure, improvement efforts; Ohio : Unemployment rate; Ohio : V&M STAR Ohio in Youngstown; Taxation : Tax relief; Treasury, Department of the : Troubled Asset Relief Program; White House Office : Automotive Communities and Workers, White House Council on.

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